

IT'S YOUR WORLD

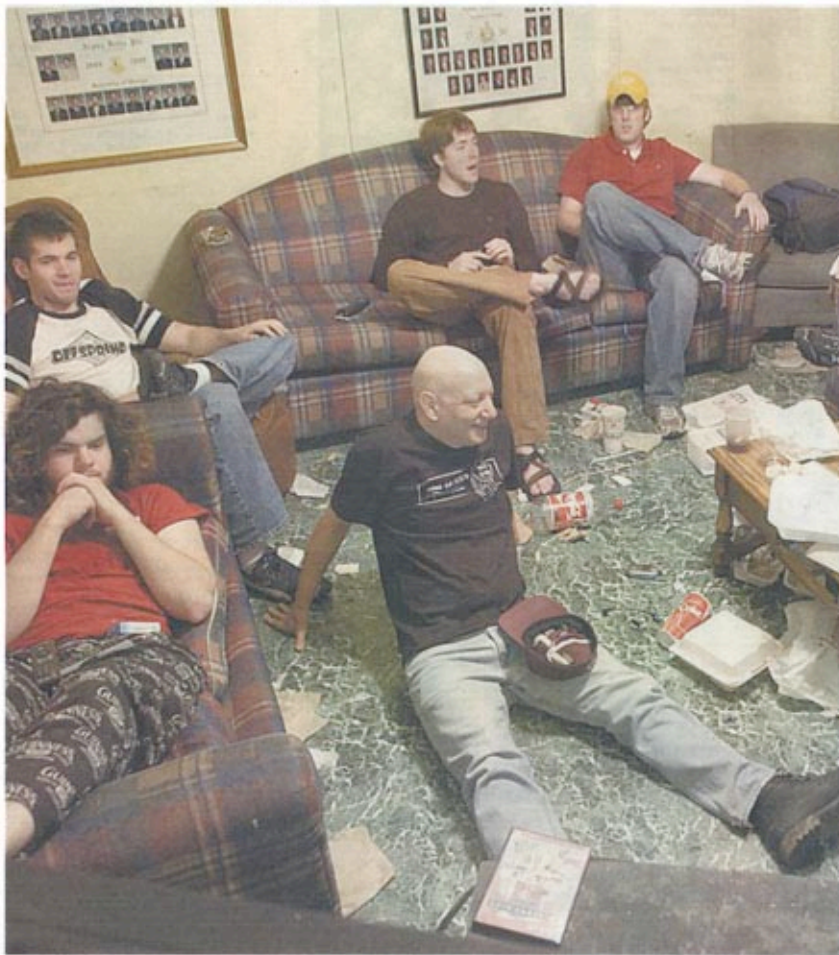
# LIFESTYLES

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**MOVING**

Our Fashion coverage moves to Tuesdays beginning next week.

**THURSDAY**



Physics major Brad Sugarman, the mature gent on the floor, is the same age as the dads of his fraternity brothers at the Alpha Delta Phi house at the University of Chicago. | **PHOTOGRAPH BY**

WOLFGANG PETER

# CHICAGO SUN-TIMES

50¢ | LATE SPORTS FINAL | suntimes.com | THURSDAY, APRIL 5, 2007 | LISTLESS 38° 26° | Let's get into it.

## 'Oldest guy on campus'

### He wants the whole experience at U. of C. — classes, roommates and life at the frat house

BY ANNETTE RACOND

**C**LASS OF 2009 THIS WAY," stated one sign and "FAMILY AND FRIENDS THIS WAY," read the other. We would soon part.

Although I had always fantasized about this day, I wasn't prepared for the emotional component. Would he eat well and get enough sleep? How would he interact with his classmates? Did he have thermal underwear?

My worrying was infinite. Would he hang with the wrong crowd? Was he taking his vitamins? His first report card would definitely be framed. But would he make the dean's list?

My own college days back in the early '80s came to mind. Armed with jumbo bags of M&Ms and Hershey's Kisses, I'd cram for finals in my miniscule dorm room at Boston University.

I felt like an overprotective mother. But I didn't have kids.

My ex-boyfriend — now my best friend — was starting his freshman year at the University of Chicago to study physics.

He was 47 years old.

I met Brad at the finish line of the 1994 Turkey Classic five-mile race in Central Park when he asked me how I managed to run so fast while changing cassettes. "Practice," I replied. "Plus, you can only listen to 'Saturday Night Fever' so many times." In 1995, we would run the Chicago Half Marathon, not knowing the significance the city would hold in the future.

I invited Brad to catch a flick at the Cineplex Odeon theater where my friend was general manager. Brad snuck in a bottle of vanilla Stolichnaya and we later headed to Papaya King for large juices and crispy fries. As vegetarians, hot dogs weren't an option — albeit tempting at a buck apiece.

Right from the start, Brad and I spent most of our time together. It was great having access to a live

reference library. I'd ask him the obscure questions that constantly popped into my head. Fortunately, Brad always supplied answers — on the spot. Besides, Google wasn't around back then.

When I was looking for a vacuum, I headed to Macy's, where a sale on Hoovers was in progress. That got me thinking. "What president was Herbert Hoover?" "Thirty-first," Brad replied.

I wondered why Brad worked as a customer service representative at a financial-services company where he made just a tad above minimum wage. He didn't appear to enjoy the work, and the price certainly wasn't right. He had also ridden cabs (Robert De Niro was once a passenger), cleaned carpets and worked as a bike messenger. When I confronted him about his employment, he abruptly replied, "Stop. Stop it now." This was obviously not a topic open to discussion.

To watch someone of Brad's intelligence living so far beneath his potential was painful. His inability to discuss the issue took a toll on our relationship. I urged him to go



**Journalist Annette Racond and her friend Brad Sugarman, a University of Chicago sophomore at 48.**



**Sugarman looks at ease with the clutter of his campus dorm room. His younger peers think he's "really cool to hang out with."** | RICH HEIN/SUN-TIMES

to college, and he resented my prodding. Five years after our inaugural Thanksgiving race, I ended our romantic relationship. But we remained close friends.

A year or so after our split, I noticed physics and calculus books in Brad's apartment. Later, I spotted SAT study guides in his knapsack. Then I saw a University of Chicago application sprawled out on his kitchen table. But I knew better than to broach the subject.

During one of our daily phone conversations, Brad chimed in, "I got an 800 in English and an 800 in Math. All I could say was, "Wow."

In September 2005, Brad was on his way to the University of Chicago to pursue a career in physics. He moved into a dorm with guys less than half his age and even became a proud member of Alpha Delta Phi.

"I wish I knew exactly why I waited so long to go to college," says Brad, now 48. "I had always planned to get a degree, but I just never focused on it. One day, I realized I had put it off for way too long and that it might never happen. I wanted it all — the full college experience. That's when I made a commitment to turn things around."

What's the hardest part of being

the oldest guy on campus? "The same thing that's hard for 18-year-olds — academics," he says.

Fortunately, he has found his new peers to be extremely supportive. "Twenty-one-year-old U. of C. student Evan Valentini has found a friend in Brad. "During school break," Valentini says, "we went to the Museum of Modern Art in New York City. Brad is really cool to hang out with. There's no awkwardness about it. He blends in well, yet still has a unique perspective on life that comes with age."

Several months ago, I attended Family Weekend with Brad's mother and her elder sister, Ruth. We attended the Dean's Brunch, where the pumpkin pancakes were divine. At the fraternity house, I watched "Weeds" on a couch I shared with chicken bones, pizza crust and pretzels. It wasn't much different from sitting in Brad's Manhattan apartment — except for the chicken bones (remember, we're vegetarians).

College and Brad are a perfect fit. I'm proud to say, "That's my boy."

Annette Racond is a New York City-based writer whose work has appeared in numerous publications. She is working on a memoir.

### A DAY IN THE LIFE OF BRAD

AS TOLD TO ANNETTE RACOND

**Midnight** — Head to Bar Night at my fraternity, Alpha Delta Phi.

**1 a.m.** — Still at Bar Night, but I'm now behind the bar working hour-long bartending shift. Girls wanting free beer start flirting.

**2 a.m.** — Win at beer pong.

**2:30 a.m.** — Lose at beer pong.

**3 a.m.** — Had enough of beer pong. Watch brothers shotgunning.

**4 a.m.** — Back to dorm. Check Facebook. Collapse in bed.

**7 a.m.** — Alarm goes off. I hit snooze button.

**7:10 a.m.** — Same as above.

**7:20 a.m.** — Same as above.

**7:30 a.m.** — Get up, check Facebook and immediately begin working on physics problem set due at 11:30.

**11:15 a.m.** — Fill 25-ounce spill-proof thermal mug with Hawaiian Kona coffee freshly brewed in my French Press, jump on bike, and head to physics class.

**11:30 a.m.** — Physics class.

**12:30 p.m.** — Math class.

**1:30 p.m.** — Lunch. Pass on watery pre-made scrambled eggs and opt for made-to-order vegetable omelet. Stuff an apple in my knapsack for later.

**2:15 p.m.** — Math problem set turns out to be more challenging than expected. Rush to complete assignment that's due in professor's mailbox by 5 p.m., sharp (or risk getting a failing grade). Maybe going to Bar Night yesterday wasn't such a good idea after all.

**4:55 p.m.** — At professor's mailbox, join group of classmates who are also frantically trying to finish their homework before he arrives to pick it up.

**9 p.m.** — Professor doesn't show so I keep working on assignment. Drop it in mailbox.

**9:30 p.m.** — Stop by fraternity house to watch some TV with brothers.

**10:30 p.m.** — Head to library until it closes at midnight to work on social science paper.